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ABSTRACT

This preliminary report of a National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) project briefly assesses teaching materials related to peace and nuclear warfare. Covering elementary, secondary, and higher education, the materials discussed present a variety of activities, decision-making approaches, and analytical assessments of policies of many countries. Topics include crucial decisions of the nuclear age, history of weaponry, and imagining alternative futures. In addition to the specific curricula mentioned, four general resource guides published by national organizations are noted. Finally, several sources are listed which concentrate on the USSR and the Cold War. (KC)

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NCSS PEACE STUDIES PROJECT: AN INTERIM REPORT

January
1983

BY
Michael Ferber

Nuclear armament and disarmament, the threat of war and the means to peace, the "Freeze," the MX, and the "cruise" have moved onto the center of national debate and are not likely to leave it soon.

Whether prompted by their own sense of what is educationally important or moved by the troubled questions of their students, many teachers in the social studies have begun to teach these subjects for the first time. There are some who have been addressing war and peace questions for years. But for most it is a new venture into an emotionally and politically charged area.

The National Council for the Social Studies felt it could help in a small way by identifying and assessing existing curricular materials and teaching experiences, and then by developing new materials wherever the need appeared. I have undertaken the first phase of this by locating existing materials and making a preliminary assessment of what I have seen.

I imagined at first that finding good materials might be the main task, but I soon learned that a great deal of it exists already. A lot more is now being written or tested. In fact, taking into account all the books, charts, films, videotapes, slide shows, and the like that are suitable for high school or junior high, the amount of material is overwhelming. The main task has become one of summarizing and assessing, and this report makes an effort to do so. It will necessarily be selective, even somewhat random, though I believe I have covered the main available resources.

The development of new materials does not appear to be the greatest need, or even an important need, therefore, at this time. A good teacher, with a few suggestions, can develop his or her own classroom materials without great difficulty.

What <u>is</u> difficult is finding the courage and energy to go ahead with it, often in the teeth of stubborn administrators or suspicious parents, often with one's own misgivings about the wisdom of dragging children through such traumatic material. The most pressing need is for support structures to help teachers deal with these problems.

More and more communities, PTAs, educators' associations, and of course the children themselves are <u>asking</u> for classes or courses in nuclear war and peace. This makes it easier for many teachers, but for many more the situation remains difficult. One NCSS member from the Midwest wrote me that she is "very angry about the essential refusal of my department chairman to allow a balanced review of the issue so the students could decide how they thought," and she is not alone.

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Several national networks of teachers, students, and parents already exist, such as Educators for Social Responsibility. There are no doubt local groups in the larger cities. But it seemed to me that the NCSS could facilitate the contacts some teachers feel they need by circulating a "name bank" of those who have had some experience in this area and would be willing to talk on the telephone or meet directly with other teachers who live nearby. We would be glad to hear from anyone willing to be listed.

In the meantime, teachers may wish to write Educators for Social Responsibility to learn who else in their city or state is part of their network (639 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge MA 02139) or to the Peace Education Network of COPRED (Consortium on Peace Research, Education, and Development), Center for Peaceful Change, Kent State University, Kent OH 44242).

Some teachers may disagree with me and feel at a loss as to how to proceed in the classroom even if they feel confident of its wisdom and propriety. Do we have to explain nuclear physics? Do we have to dwell on the horrors of Hiroshima? Is it necessary to unravel the origins of the Cold War? What about the esoteric terminology and acronyms--GLCM, SLBM, MIRV, and SALT, "fratricide," "kill-ratios," and all the rest?

Is there any way to relieve the bleakness of it all, without trivializing it into video-game fantasies? For these teachers the chief virtue of the existing courses will be their many suggestions for classroom "gimmicks": historical re-enactments (You are Truman in 1945, and have heard twelve advisers saying twelve things about Japan and the bomb...), simulation games (two teams with X interests and Y resources threaten war...), interviews with parents or older friends ("Do you think we can ever trust the Russians?"), brain-storming, journal-keeping, drawing political cartoons, and so on.

The fullest curriculum I have seen is Decision-Making in a Nuclear Age, by Elizabeth Lewis and Roberta Snow (February 1982). It was until recently available for $10 from Facing History and Ourselves, 25 Kennard Road, Brookline MA 02146. It is undergoing revision in the light of further classroom experience. Interested teachers should write and inquire. It has 254 pages and seems to cover a semester or trimester of classes at more or less the tenth-grade level. It relies in part on journal-writing but makes use of an abundance of printed materials, all of which it provides, plus audio-visual materials, for which it gives addresses.

The theme is decision-making, and it dwells on some of the crucial decisions of the nuclear age: Truman's decision to use the bomb; the Baruch plan and atomic secrets; Kennedy and the Cuban missile crisis. It prepares students to "make decisions" for disarmament or a continued arms race in the 1980s, and brings up the issue of "Who decides?" The course approaches the subject via technology--"appropriate" tools, "improvements," scale, human control, unintended consequences. It introduces nuclear physics and the effects of a bomb.

The National Education Association (1201 16th Street NW, Washington DC 20036) has a junior-high curriculum called Choices that NEA is pilot-testing now. It is 173 pages long and is most of the material a teacher will need--maps, drawings, articles-- for xeroxing. It is somewhat less probing than the Lewis and Snow plan--the unit on Hiroshima, for example, discusses only the effects of the bomb, not the decisions leading to its use--but it covers a variety of topics well: sources of conflict and means of resolving them, history of weaponry, US-Soviet relations, ways to reduce the risk of war, how to think for oneself, imagining alternative futures. There is a good resource list.

The Education Task Force of Jobs With Peace (10 West Street, Boston MA 02111) has three short curricula called Crossroads ($2.50 each, all three for $7). The social science course is 33 pages long (plus a resource list) and is designed to be a six-day "mini-course." (The other two, English and science, are quite similar.) It begins, like the others, with Hiroshima, spends considerable time on the Soviet threat, and dwells as well on the federal budget and the conflicts between military and social service spending.

I doubt if these curricula would exist had their authors not been alarmed by the Reagan administration's policies, but I do not think the materials are unfair or unbalanced. It is hard, in any case, to know exactly what "balance" would mean in a subject of this scope, complexity, and seriousness. American public opinion has shifted several times since 1945 on the wisdom of nuclear weapons, the role of the U.N., the menace of the Soviets, the size of defense spending, and so on. What seems a balanced debate one year will seem extreme or irrelevant the next.

These curricula cast a critical eye on all arguments and all policies of all countries. They do not, in my opinion, foster any illusions about the Soviet Union, any more than they assume that the U.S. has been unusually virtuous in foreign affairs. The bulk of the material is U.S. government statements, historical documents, and newspaper reports. St. Thomas Aquinas and Lenin, Jefferson and Churchill, are quoted. Some material comes from disarmament groups but there are references to conservative think tanks as well.

The Crossroads series, which has been endorsed by the Massachusetts Teachers Association and is used in many classrooms, ends by suggesting forms of student action. The authors explain that "the activities of Day Six are a crucial part of this mini-course. We have found that the issues can be so disturbing and overwhelming to young students that they can fall into a depressed despair. It is extremely important for young people (in fact, all people) to overcome this passive resignation and, instead, take some control in their lives. Therefore, we encourage you to make sure students participate in at least one activity, even if it is just the letter campaign to Jobs With Peace." The "Action Sheet" suggests writing a letter to one's congressperson, circulating a petition for a nuclear weapons freeze, holding a forum or a referendum in one's school, attending a demonstration, or forming a chapter of STOP (Student/Teacher Organization to Prevent Nuclear War), a network of groups in at least sixty high schools around the country (Box 232, Northfield MA 01360).

The two other curricula also discuss taking action. They also discuss the barriers that students might feel (e.g., peer-pressure), but they are a little less partisan. If, after considering the arguments, a student concludes that we need more bombs, he or she will find similar ways to take action. It is a general spirit of critical thinking and empathetic imagining that all three curricula promote, rather than any particular positions.

There are other curricula in use or undergoing trials. Sue Roff of the Eleanor Roosevelt Institute (Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY 12538) wrote of materials on nuclear education being developed for publication this year. They are being tested in three Chicago schools. International Student Pugwash recently held a conference of teachers and is planning to publish a book of materials and reports (305 Massachusetts Avenue NE, Washington DC 20002). Two teachers from Ohio wrote that they have successfully used "A Minicourse on Nuclear War" produced by Ground Zero (806 15th Street NW, Suite 421, Washington DC 20036).

The Nuclear Information and Resource Service (NIRS) has published a quite thorough "Resource Guide for High School Teachers" and another for elementary school teachers (1346 Connecticut Ave NW, 4th floor, Washington DC 20036. Call toll-free (800) 424-2477 weekday afternoons. $5.00 + 85¢ postage).

Educators for Social Responsibility (639 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge MA 02139) has a planning and curriculum resource guide for its "Day of Dialogue" program. It includes a great deal of material categorized by grade level K-12. ($12.50).

Interracial Books for Children has a double-number Bulletin (13:6-7) on "Militarism and Education" (1841 Broadway, New York NY 10023). It lists quite a few organizations and evaluates new books for young people as well as the standard textbooks in American history. It sells for $3.00 + 50¢ postage.

Teachers should probably order at least one of these last three in order to get the lists of groups and publications. There are far too many to include here. Another large compendium of information is The Disarmament Catalogue, available in bookstores for $12.95 (Pilgrim Press, 132 W 31st Street, New York, NY 10001). The Disarmament Catalogue describes peace studies programs at about 40 American colleges and universities.

At the college level, the group to contact for material is the Center for War/Peace Studies, 132 West 31st Street, 218 East 18th Street, New York NY 10003.

One cannot go far in a class on nuclear weapons without dealing with the Cold War. The "What about the Russians?" question will make any teacher anxious. How can one be fair to the USSR without being attacked or dismissed as "soft on the Russians"? If one takes a hard line, can the students be encouraged to look critically at Cold War propaganda from both sides? The curricula I have examined all offer materials and classroom suggestions on this inescapable but troubling topic, but for further discussions let me suggest several other sources:

What about the Russians?, by Sanford Gottlieb, is an attractively printed booklet that provides a "tough-minded look at the Soviets, and how to live on the same planet with them." It is clearly written and addressed to young readers; it has a few discussion questions at the end. Available from STOP, Box 232, Northfield MA 01360, for $2.50 (includes postage). Bulk rates are available.

Another useful pamphlet is Questions and Answers on the Soviet Threat, by the American Friends Service Committee. It is available for $1 each (80¢ each for 11 to 50 copies, 70¢ each beyond that, plus 15% postage) from any AFSC office. The main office is 1501 Cherry Street, Philadelphia PA 19102.

There is an interesting article by psychiatrist John Mack called "But What About the Russians?" in Harvard Magazine (March-April 1982).

Sidney Lens' book, The Bomb (Dutton, $11.50), written for young readers tells the story of the bomb and the Cold War.

There are plenty of arguments offered against the freeze and other peace initiatives on the grounds that the Soviets have the worst intentions and cannot be trusted. One could write to the Heritage Foundation to see what they have on this subject (513 C Street NE, Washington DC 20002). There is also a group called The Committee to Prevent Nuclear War, which endorses Reagan's rearmament program (413 East Capitol Street, Washington DC 20003).

For a European view, see E. P. Thompson's eloquent book, Beyond the Cold War (Pantheon, $5.95). Thompson, a historian and leading spokesperson for the British nuclear disarmament movement, is a man of the left but no admirer of the Soviet Union. He analyzes what the Cold War means now, whatever its origins, and argues that the forces of democracy in Eastern Europe (such as Solidarity in Poland and the Helsinki and church groups in other countries), in concert with the peace movement in Western Europe, could create a nuclear-free Europe and a reversal of the Cold War momentum.

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NOTE: I am grateful to Roberta Snow, who not only co-authored Decision-Making in a Nuclear Age, but is an experienced high school teacher, for meeting with me personally in Washington. I would also like to thank all the NCSS members who have written with suggestions or encouragement.

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